



*United States Attorney
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**ASBESTOS INSPECTOR SENTENCED TO 41 MONTHS IN U.S. PRISON
FOR ILLEGAL ASBESTOS REMOVAL FROM MANHATTAN BUILDING**

JAMES B. COMEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that NECHEMIA BLATTER, a/k/a "Nathan Blatter," a New York State licensed asbestos inspector and the President of Araz, Inc., was sentenced to 41 months in federal prison in Manhattan federal court late yesterday for removing asbestos illegally from a building located at 19-23 St. Mark's Place in Manhattan.

BLATTER pled guilty on June 3, 2003, to an Information charging him with causing asbestos, a hazardous air pollutant, to be removed from the building in violation of Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA")-issued work practice standards. These work practice standards apply to building renovations involving at least 160 square feet of asbestos-containing material, and require that the EPA be notified at least 10 days before the asbestos removal.

Because asbestos is a hazardous air pollutant, as set

forth in the Information, EPA has strict rules regarding supervision and training for asbestos removal jobs, as well as specific, well-defined directives for handling asbestos in order to protect its handlers and the public. According to the Information, BLATTER violated these asbestos removal rules by sending a crew of workers into the building to remove an asbestos-containing ceiling without making the necessary government filings and without complying with the legal rules governing asbestos removals.

The Information charges that no one trained in the asbestos work practice standards was present when they did this work, and that they violated a series of specific EPA regulations when they did it. Specifically, as set forth in the Information, the workers did not wet the ceiling before removing it, as they were required to do. In addition, in violation of the EPA rules, the workers allowed the asbestos material to drop to the floor, and then swept it into openings through which it fell to the basement floor. Instead of sealing the asbestos material in leak-tight containers, as the rules require, the workers placed the asbestos material in open bins, which did not have labels warning about asbestos or its dangers, removed some of those bins and dumped them into a truck outside the building.

Under the terms of the plea agreement under which he pled guilty, BLATTER is to be permanently barred from the

demolition and asbestos removal businesses.

BLATTER was ordered to surrender to the custody of the Bureau of Prisons on December 15, 2003.

Mr. COMEY praised the efforts of the FBI and of the EPA's Criminal Investigations Division in the investigation of this case. He also praised the New York City Department of Environmental Protection's Asbestos Control Program and the New York City Department of Sanitation's Environmental Police for their work in connection with the investigation of the illegal removal of asbestos charged in the Information.

Assistant United States Attorney ANNE C. RYAN is in charge of the prosecution.

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